

Clean Ohio Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program

2025 Policies and Guidelines for Landowner Application Through Certified and Funded Local Sponsor

Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA)
Office of Farmland Preservation

The Ohio Department of Agriculture's Office of Farmland Preservation anticipates distributing \$6.0 million in this round of the Clean Ohio Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP). The funds will be used to purchase agricultural easements from Ohio farmland owners.

In addition to reading through the following 2025 Policies which are listed below, please review the following documents and share them with the farmland owner:

- Sample Deed of Agricultural Easement
- Sample Purchase Agreement
- Site Visit Form

Complete Application – Any application may be deemed incomplete and ineligible for funding if all required information and attachments are not submitted with the application to ODA and the Local Sponsor. Data must be accurate as of the day of electronic application submission. If changes occur, contact the Local Sponsor and ODA.

Note to Local Sponsors: Top-ranking applications submitted for approval for funding must include all required attachments and signatures as of the closing date of ODA's application period.

Farm – An application must consist of parcel(s) held by the same legal interest. Each applicant farm must be a minimum of 40 acres unless the land is located adjacent to property with an agricultural easement or is adjacent to **permanently protected** land compatible with agriculture, including natural resource, open space, or forested land protected by conservation easements, as well as wetlands, public parks, open spaces, forests, airports, military bases, wildlife areas, natural preserves, historic or archaeological sites, conservancy parks, reservoirs, water wellfields, battlefields, flood pools and other normally undevelopable waterbodies, publicly-owned agricultural research lands, and water wellhead protection areas. In this case, the land may be a minimum of 25 acres. All contiguous parcels owned by the same legal interest must be submitted. See OAC § 901-2-01 (M) for "contiguous parcels" definition. No contiguous parcels under the same ownership can be withheld from the application unless waived by ODA and the Local Sponsor.

Eligibility and Scoring Criteria – An application property's enrollment in all eligibility criteria (e.g., "Agricultural District" ORC Chapter 929, "Current Agricultural Use Valuation ("CAUV")" ORC § 5713.30) must be in place by the application deadline as set

by the Local Sponsor. Furthermore, an application property's enrollment, designation, or other submitted data within the application (e.g., "Agricultural Security Area ('ASA') ORC Chapter 931, Ohio's Historic Family Farms Program) must also be in place and documented accurately as of the closing date of the landowner application period.

Current Agricultural Use Value (CAUV) enrollment – The application property must be enrolled in the Current Agricultural Use Value (CAUV) program through the County Auditor. The CAUV enrollment period is January-March and applications must be made to the County Auditor.

Agricultural District Enrollment – The application property must be enrolled in the Agricultural District program, with the exception of the homestead, wind energy-producing facilities, bio-digesters for on-farm use and/or any other land use determined excepted by the director. The Agricultural District enrollment period is January-March and applications must be made to the County Auditor.

No Subdividing Policy – All parcels that make up an application will be bound together by one permanent agricultural easement. In the future, if the land under easement is sold or transferred, all parcels must be conveyed as one unit and cannot be sold or transferred separately. The purpose of this policy is to preserve entire farms.

Farmstead/Homestead Policy – ODA's farmstead policy permits one homestead to be reserved if no housing currently exists on the applicant property. The reservation allows for one-single family home to be built in the future. If housing exists on the property at the time of application, then no additional residences may be built. Any future or existing house on the preserved farm may not be subdivided from the farm. The purpose of this policy is to promote farm families living on the land they work.

Conservation Plan Policy – If selected for funding, a farm must have a Conservation Plan in place before the Deed of Agricultural Easement is finalized. Conservation Plans can be prepared in consultation with the United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or the local Soil and Water Conservation District in which the property is located.

Forest Management Plan Policy – If selected for funding, a farm that contains 40 contiguous acres of forest or if 20% of the applicant property is forestland, then a written forest management/woodland plan or Conservation Plan component must be in place before the Deed of Agricultural Easement is finalized.

Zoning Policy – Where the local governments have adopted zoning, applicant farms must be zoned for agricultural use. The purpose of this policy is to ensure preservation is consistent with the local governments' long-term planning for the area.

Exception/Waivers Policy – To request an Exception or waiver of an application requirement, write to the Director of ODA in the care of the Office of Farmland Preservation. The letter may be submitted through mail (please address the letter to the

Office of Farmland Preservation) or email (farmlandpres@agri.ohio.gov). The Local Sponsor conducting the local application process must be copied on the letter. The letter shall indicate the exception requested, include aerial or topographic maps distinguishing the property and associated parcel numbers, and indicate local sponsor support for the request.

Contiguous Parcel Exception: O.A.C. 901-2-02(A)(5) requires all contiguous parcels owned by the same legal interest must be submitted in the landowner application. However, that requirement can be waived.

Large Farm Exception: If an exception is granted, the landowner has the option to submit one or both halves of the farm as individual applications.

- **Large Farm Size Exception:** Farms comprised of no less than 400 acres may request the one-time option to apply the farm in two applications of approximately equal size.
- **Large Farm Value Exception:** If the applicant farm's points-based appraisal is greater than \$1 million, the landowner may request the one-time option to apply the farm in two applications of approximately equal size.

Small Farm Exception: If an exception is granted by the Director, the landowner has the ability to submit a farm of 10-24 acres so long as it shares a substantial border with permanently protected land compatible with agriculture, including natural resource, open space, or forested land protected by conservation easements, as well as wetlands, public parks, open spaces, forests, airports, military bases, wildlife areas, natural preserves, prison farms, historic or archaeological sites, conservancy parks, reservoirs, well fields, battlefields, flood pools and other normally undevelopable waterbodies, publicly-owned agricultural research lands, and well heads.

Determining whether to grant exceptions and waivers is at the discretion of the Director of ODA. The Director's approval must be obtained prior to the submission of an application during the landowner application period and a copy of such approval shall be submitted with the other required attachments to the application.

Title Costs – If selected for funding, the Local Sponsor (on behalf of ODA) may initiate a title examination and purchase title insurance. The costs incurred for these services – along with escrow, closing, and recording services – will be deducted from the agricultural easement purchase payment at closing.

Funding/Landowner Payment – A landowner can receive up to 75% of the appraised value of the easement. Additionally, the maximum dollar amount per acre is set at \$2,000 and the total dollar amount per farm is set at \$500,000. No individual may sell more than one easement in this round of funding**. The Director also reserves the

right to adopt additional guidelines according to OAC § 901-2-05 (D).

**Contact the Office of Farmland Preservation regarding repeating landowners (more than one application being submitted).

Multi-County Farm – If a landowner requests to apply a farm that is located within more than one county, the landowner must apply under the county with the majority of the farm’s acreage. This majority-acreage (primary) county must be a part of the Local Sponsor’s landowner application area. The applicant must answer landowner application questions based on the majority-acreage county. A multi-county farm will have a deed and Present Condition Report recorded in each county in which the applicant property is located. Note: Under the LAEPP, only one Local Sponsor may co-hold an easement with ODA.

The following additional steps for a multi-county farm need to be addressed before the farm is selected for funding:

- Local Sponsors that are political subdivisions: Obtain your own organization’s resolution (per Attachment A) as well as resolutions supporting the agricultural easement from all other townships and counties in which the farm sits. (Example: Smith County SWCD is the Local Sponsor, submitting an application for a farm that sits in both Smith County (Roberts Township) and Jones County (Wilson Township). They must attach 1) Smith SWCD resolution, 2) Jones County resolution, and 3) Wilson Township resolution).
- Local Sponsors that are charitable organizations: Obtain resolutions supporting the agricultural easement from all counties and townships in which the farm sits (per Attachment H), along with your own organizational resolution (per Attachment A). (Example: Able Land Trust is the Local Sponsor, submitting an application for a farm that sits in both Smith County (Roberts Township) and Jones County (Wilson Township). They must attach 1) Able Land Trust resolution, 2) Smith County resolution, 3) Roberts Township resolution, 4) Jones County resolution, and 5) Wilson Township resolution)

Note: Only one Local Sponsor may co-hold an easement with ODA and be named on the Deed. Therefore, Resolutions from minority-acreage (secondary) entities must include a reference that the funded Local Sponsor will be holding the easement with ODA.

Natural Resources Conservation Service [NRCS] federal matching reimbursement – If Local Sponsor elects to apply for additional funding through Natural Resources Conservation Service’s [NRCS] Agricultural Conservation Easement Purchase Program/Agricultural Land Easement [ACEP-ALE], a reminder that only 2025 LAEPP projects can be submitted for 2025 NRCS funding. Additionally, all potential federal projects will remain Contingent until ODA has signed the NRCS Cooperative/Program Agreement.

Date: 12/10/2024