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RE: Office of Management and Budget hearing

The League of Women Voters of Delaware supports a \$10 million funding allocation for farmland preservation.

As you know, the League has a rich history of fairness and equity. There may be no program in all of Delaware that is more fair than this one, designed to keep viable our state's most economically significant industry. The American Farmland Trust puts Delaware's farmland preservation second only to New Jersey's in terms of effectiveness, according to a report that came out this year.¹

Crucial to the success of this program is consistency in funding. Although this year has been fairly disastrous in many ways, it's important to keep the funding steady for this \$8 billion industry. Another American Farmland Trust report points out Delaware as number 10 of the 12 states with the most threatened agricultural land, noting that a successful agriculture industry is crucial in the face of extreme disruptions.² The particular threat, according to the report, is low-density residential development, a phenomenon that fragments the landscape and disrupts agricultural economies.

Keeping government spending at a decent level is one of our most significant tasks, and particularly in the face of this relentless pandemic. A study spanning 20 states shows that for every tax dollar, government pays 37 cents for services for farmland and open space, compared with \$1.16 for services to residential development.³

Oldtimers say that the original goal of Delaware's agland program was to preserve half of Delaware's farmland. We're now at about 139,000 acres, but still far short of the 250,000 acres that would constitute half of our farmland.

¹Coastal Point, *Delaware Aglands Program ranks second in U.S. for preserving farmland* June 22, 2020 https://www.coastalpoint.com/news/business/agriculture/delaware-aglands-program-ranks-second-in-u-s-for-preserving-farmland/article_5570b2fa-b4d2-11ea-b555-2fc550145c39.html

² American Farmland Trust, 2020 *What's at stake when we pave over, fragment and otherwise fail to protect farmland from the disruptions of development?* <https://farmland.org/fut-national-pr/>

³ American Farmland Trust, *Cost of Community Services Studies* 2016 https://conservationtools-production.s3.amazonaws.com/library_item_files/352/1464/Cost_of_Community_Services_Studies_AFT_FIC_201609.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIQFJLILYGVD4AMQ&Expires=1605206565&Signature=f3EjIU5lri10lrPZS%2FkvHWgiJdM%3D

The farmland preservation program not only supports the farming industry by which many residents earn their living, but it supports the farms which add intangible values to our quality of life. Delaware farms provide locally accessible foods and they provide the bucolic loveliness which we all enjoy as we drive through the countryside. Researchers associated with the nearby Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (Philadelphia's "WILMAPCO") have even computed the dollar value of the ecological value of farmland and other open space.⁴

The League urges the Office of Management and Budget to allocate \$10 million for farmland preservation.

⁴ Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission *The Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania*, 2017 <https://www.dvrpc.org/Reports/11033B.pdf>