

St. Joseph County Farmland Preservation Program

Selection Criteria: Scoring System for Prioritizing Landowner Applications

INTRODUCTION

Part 362 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (MCL 324.36201 to 324.36207) created the Agricultural Preservation Fund and the Agricultural Preservation Fund Board. The purpose of the fund is to provide state matching dollars to local units of government for the purchase of development rights from qualified farmland. Qualifications for the APF, specified in the *Policies and Procedures for the Michigan Agricultural Preservation Fund*, require a local unit of government to adopt a scoring system to rank parcels under application in terms of priority for preservation.

The Selection Criteria were developed by the St. Joseph County Agricultural Preservation Board (CAPB), established by the County Board of Commissioners on February 21, 2006. The CAPB developed the Selection Criteria for prioritizing applications to the St. Joseph County Farmland Preservation Program, created on March 15, 2005. The Selection Criteria were approved by the CAPB on May 10, 2007 and by the County Board of Commissioners on June 5, 2007, and include consideration of:

- 1) Agricultural Capability (20 possible points)
- 2) Location (30 possible points)
- 3) Management Practices (15 possible points)
- 4) Local Funding (20 possible points)
- 5) Discretionary (15 possible points)

The objective of this rating system is to prioritize farmland to be preserved in agricultural use via purchase of development rights. When funding sources permit, the rating system will be the sole determining factor for prioritizing farmland for preservation.

Prior to being scored, applications will be reviewed by county staff for completeness. Final selections will be made by the CAPB with approval from the County Board of Commissioners for submission to state and/or federal governments for matching funds. All applications must meet these **MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS** in order to apply:

- 1) The property owner has signed the application indicating that he or she is interested in voluntarily selling the development rights to the farmland.
- 2) At least 51% of the land area is devoted to an active agricultural use as defined in Part 362 of the NREPA.
- 3) The municipality in which the farmland is located has signed the application indicating its approval of the application to the CAPB.
- 4) The farmland is not zoned for commercial, industrial, or residential uses at densities greater than 0.5 dwelling units per acre (1 unit per 2 acres) under the municipal zoning ordinance.
- 5) Agricultural activities are a permitted use on the land under the municipal zoning ordinance.

SCORING SYSTEM

AGRICULTURAL CAPABILITY (20 points)

1) Soil Productivity - 20 possible points

Priority is placed on productive farmland that has the highest capacity for agricultural production and is therefore considered prime and/or unique. Farmland is considered prime and/or unique if it is rated as "prime farmland" or "farmland of local importance" by the USDA NRCS Web Soil Survey (<http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>). The percentage of prime and/or unique farmland in an application is the number of acres considered "prime farmland" or "farmland of local importance" divided by the total number of acres in the application.

Points for agricultural productivity are determined by multiplying the percentage of prime and/or unique acres of farmland in the application by 20 to receive a score between 0 and 20. The percentage of prime and/or unique acres of farmland in an application is to be verified by a NRCS Conservationist, District Soil Conservationist, or Michigan State University Extension Educator.

LOCATION (30 points)

2) Parcel Size – 10 possible points

Priority is placed on larger parcels to help create more economically viable agricultural production units. Points for parcel size are based on the amount of acreage in the application. If the amount of farmland in the application is:

200 acres or more	10 points
160 to 199 acres	8 points
120 to 159 acres	6 points
80 to 119 acres	4 points
40 to 79 acres	2 points
0 to 39 acres	0 points

- Two parcels under the same ownership may be submitted as one application provided the parcels are not more than ½ mile apart.

3) Proximity to Permanently Preserved Land – 5 possible points

Priority is placed on farmland that is in closer proximity to other permanently preserved land. Points are based on the linear distance from the farmland to other permanently preserved farmland, publicly owned land for public use, or land protected from development by a conservation easement or deed restriction, in which development rights may have been purchased, transferred or donated. If the farmland in the application is:

Adjacent to preserved land	5 points
Not adjacent to but ¼ mile or less from preserved land	4 points
Greater than ¼ to ½ mile from preserved land	3 points
Greater than ½ to ¾ mile from preserved land	2 points
Greater than ¾ to 1 mile from preserved land	1 point
Greater than 1 mile from preserve land	0 points

4) Percentage of Surrounding Land in Agricultural Use – 5 possible points

Priority is placed on farmland located in areas predominantly in agricultural use rather than areas dominated by non-agricultural uses. A ½ mile buffer surrounding the farmland in the application will be used to determine the percentage of surrounding land in agricultural use. A surrounding parcel is considered in agricultural use if at least 51% of the parcel is devoted to an active agricultural use. Points are based on the number of acres in agricultural use divided by the total number of acres of land in the ½ mile buffer. If:

Greater than 75% of the surrounding land is in agricultural use	5 points
Greater than 50% to 75% of the surrounding land in agricultural use	3 points
Greater than 25% to 50% of the surrounding land in agricultural use	1 point
25% or less of the surrounding land is in agricultural use	0 points

5) Proximity to Development Pressure – 5 possible points

Priority is placed on farmland that is in closer proximity to existing community services with the exception that farmland adjacent to city/village limits receive the lowest priority for preservation. Points are based on the linear distance from the farmland in the application to the closest city/village limits. If the parcel is:

½ mile or less from city/village limits	0 points
Greater than ½ to 1 mile from city/village limits	5 points
Greater than 1 to 1½ miles from city/village limits	4 points
Greater than 1½ to 2 miles from city/village limits	3 points
Greater than 2 to 2½ miles from city/village limits	2 points
Greater than 2½ miles from city/village limits	1 point

6) Proximity to Livestock Operations – 2 possible points

Priority is placed on farmland that is in closer proximity to existing livestock farms, creating an additional buffer between livestock and residential neighbors and protecting a land base that can also be used for feed production or manure disposal. A livestock operation for this purpose means a farm with more than 100 animal units (EPA definition). Points are based on the linear distance from the farmland in the application to the closest livestock farm. If the parcel is:

½ mile or less from the edge of an animal confinement area	2 points
Greater than ½ to 1 mile from the edge of an animal confinement area	1 point
Greater than 1 mile from the edge of an animal confinement area	0 points

7) Proximity to Farmland under PA 116 Agreements – 3 possible points

Priority is placed on farmland that is in closer proximity to farmland under existing PA 116 agreements. Points are based on the linear distance from the farmland in the application to the closest land under a PA 116 agreement. If the farmland is:

Adjacent to or touching land under a PA 116 agreement	3 points
Not adjacent to but ½ mile or less from land under a PA 116 agreement	2 points
Greater than ½ to 1 mile from land under a PA 116 agreement	1 point
Greater than 1 mile from land under a PA 116 agreement	0 points

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (15 points)

8) Conservation Plans and Practices – 15 possible points

The presence of conservation plans and practices on a farm helps protect the public investment of preserving farmland. Once farmland is preserved it is important to maintain the agricultural resource and protect existing conservation resources on the farmland by practicing sound stewardship. This can be partially achieved by having a conservation plan in place. Up to 15 points may be awarded for management practices on the farmland in the application, as determined by:

- The farm has a soil conservation plan filed with the NRCS 5 points
- Level of implementation of the soil conservation plan, as recommended by the District Conservationist up to 5pts
- Participation in one or more of the following programs: 5 points
 - Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program Verification (Livestock, Farmstead, or Cropping System)
 - Conservation Security Program Enrollment (Tier I, II, or III)
 - Certified Organic Farm (listed in the MDA Organic Farm Registry)

LOCAL FUNDING (20 points)

9) Local Matching Funds – 20 possible points

Priority is placed on farmland with committed local matching funds. Local matching funds may be money contributed by public (township or county), private (industry), or non-profit (foundation or conservancy) sources or may be the landowner's offer to accept less than the appraised value of the development rights (a donation of a portion of the development rights value). A letter of commitment regarding local matching funds must accompany the application. Points are based on the percentage of PDR value of the farmland committed, as follows:

1 point will be awarded for every 5% of the PDR value committed in local matching funds. A maximum of 20 points will be awarded if 100% of the PDR value is committed in local matching funds.

Example: 25% match = 5 points

DISCRETIONARY (15 points)

10) Discretionary Considerations by the Board – 15 possible points

The CAPB may award points to an application based on additional characteristics of the farmland in the application, relative to other applications. The CAPB retains the right to withhold points, but in awarding points, will provide the basis for the discretionary points. In awarding discretionary points the CAPB may consider, but is not limited to, the following:

- Historical Characteristics
 - Centennial Farm
 - Local, State, or Federal historic designation
- Archeological Characteristics
- Geographical characteristics
 - Scenic vistas
 - Proximity to and/or frontage on a major thoroughfare

- Enrollment in PA 116
- Management practices consistent with the Michigan Department of Agriculture Generally Accepted Agricultural Management Practices.
- The extent to which the awarding of the grant will act as a demonstration project in the community to further the goals of farmland preservation.
- The extent to which the community has established a funding commitment to protect additional farmland in the future (e.g. bonds, millages, etc.).
- Natural Resource/Open Space Features
 - Complements a local open space preservation plan
 - Presence of environmentally important lands
- Existing hardships, risk factors or threats to the land
 - Financial stability of the farm
 - Development pressure
- Other significant characteristics