

## **Planning Incentive Grant Overview**

The State Agriculture Development Committee in July 2007 adopted new rules that represent the most sweeping changes to the Farmland Preservation Program since its inception. One of the most significant changes was establishment of a new county planning incentive grant program that requires participating counties to develop comprehensive farmland preservation plans as a condition of farmland preservation funding.

These plans are required to explore several opportunities beyond farmland preservation, including agricultural land use planning that helps accommodate growth in ways that consume less land; agricultural economic development so farms have more opportunities to be successful; natural resource conservation to protect the resources that sustain agriculture; and overall governmental support for agriculture. Under the newly adopted rules, these components also were incorporated as a new requirement under the SADC's existing municipal planning incentive grant program.

Fifteen counties have developed comprehensive plans to participate in the new planning incentive grant program in this first year. Coordinated with those plans are 37 municipal plans developed under the municipal planning incentive grant program. Altogether, plans under the two programs target the preservation of more than 240,000 acres and explore a wide range of strategies to help sustain agriculture, ranging from promotion of community farmers markets to assisting farmers in diversifying their production to meet new markets. The county and municipal plans estimate farmland preservation funding needs of more than \$1.1 billion.

The SADC is working with three remaining counties and approximately a dozen municipalities that are developing plans to take part next year. The planning incentive grant process establishes a strong framework for municipalities, counties and the State to coordinate in the strategic targeting of farmland to ensure we retain farmland and provide the support necessary to keep successful agricultural operations on that land. One of the most significant results has been increased local understanding of the complex facets of agricultural retention beyond farmland preservation.

The planning incentive grant process implements the N.J. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Smart Growth Plan for New Jersey, which sets forth the information and tools needed by all levels of government to accommodate growth while protecting critical farmland.

The N.J. Chapter of the American Planning Association in October 2008 recognized the SADC's planning incentive grant program and associated county and municipal farmland preservation planning process with its 2008 Elwood "Woody" Jarmer Award for Outstanding Environmental Achievement, given for exceptional creativity in balancing environmental concerns with the realities of real estate development.

