



NEWS

New Jersey State Agriculture Development Committee

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Contact: Heidi Winzinger

Heidi.Winzinger@ag.nj.gov

(609) 815-6479 (cell)

Announcement from Edward D. Wengryn, NJ Secretary of Agriculture

It is with regret, yet appreciation, that I write to tell you that Susan Payne, the Executive Director of the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) since 2005, is retiring from her position as of June 1, 2024.

For more than 35 years, including her work for farmland preservation efforts in Burlington County from 1989 through 2004, Susan has been a major leader of preservation efforts. She leaves a legacy of excellence in developing, administering, and managing one of the most successful farmland preservation programs in the nation, as New Jersey has risen to prominence in this arena due in great part to Susan's dynamic leadership.

Susan, a New Jersey Professional Planner and a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners, started in Burlington County as an Assistant Farmland Preservation Coordinator, then rose to be the Office of Land Use Planning Director and Coordinator for the Farmland Preservation and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Programs at the Burlington County Office of Resource Conservation.



She was instrumental in creating numerous conservation tools, including Burlington County's popular Installment Purchase Agreements (IPAs) and the establishment of the first Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs in the state, in Lumberton and Chesterfield Townships. These significantly accelerated the permanent protection of farmland and open space in New Jersey, earning Burlington County's farmland preservation program a spot among the top ten county programs in the nation, according to the Farmland Preservation Report.

Taking on the top position of the SADC in 2005, Susan's experience and vision led the organization to restructure and move away from the easement acquisition program, instead envisioning a block grant program based on sound planning and prioritization by the local County Agricultural Development Boards and Municipal Agricultural Advisory Committees. Today, 18 counties and 45 municipalities have adopted comprehensive farmland preservation plans and participate in the PIG program.

As a reflection of Susan's vision and achievements, the SADC in 2020 was honored by the American Farmland Trust's results of a multi-year, nationwide study that ranked New Jersey number one in the nation for addressing the loss of farmland. The study found that coordination between local governments is essential to implementing a successful preservation program.

Under her leadership at SADC, two of New Jersey's largest and most complex farmland preservation transactions were accomplished – the 2008 preservation of 1,770 farm acres out of a total 1,900 acres owned by Salem Farms Corporation, formed in the 1940s by Jack Seabrook in Mannington Township, Salem County, and the 2011 preservation of Princeton Nurseries, once one of the nation's largest commercial nurseries in the heart of central New Jersey, where the SADC worked with the Monmouth County Park system to preserve 900 acres of farmland, in addition to land the county park system added to their greenways along the historic Crosswicks Creek.

In 2023, with Susan's eye toward farmland preservation goals statewide, New Jersey reached the milestone of preserving 250,000 acres of farmland through the State's Farmland Preservation Program. With this achievement, over one-third of New Jersey's farmland has been preserved under the program, and the state is approximately halfway to its goal of permanently preserving at least 500,000 acres of farmland.

Capping off Susan's career were SADC's efforts to specifically target the preservation of high-quality, strategically located farmland slated for warehouse development. This effort specifically prevents significant adverse impacts on the surrounding agricultural area and host communities that the pending or potential nonagricultural development could have caused.

The first fruit of this effort was preserving the ~566-acre Buckhorn Creek Farm in White Township, Warren County, slated for warehouse development before the SADC struck a deal to preserve the farm. This effort also solidified a model and initiative for future preservation projects involving large-scale warehouse development within significant agricultural areas.

As we prepare to move forward with a search for a new SADC executive director, I congratulate Susan, on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, the SADC, county preservation officials, and the agencies, industries, and people we serve, for a lifetime of incredible work to help preserve farmland in New Jersey. Please join me in wishing Susan good health, great happiness, and an enjoyable retirement. Congratulations and best wishes!

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