

**SADC FY2009 County Planning Incentive Grant Program**  
**County Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Planning Process**  
**Frequently Asked Questions**

**1. What is the difference between a “targeted farm” and an “eligible farm,” and how do they relate to the SADC’s new minimum quality standards?**

Recently adopted SADC regulations set new minimum quality standards (N.J.A.C. 2:76-6.20) for applicant farms that apply to all SADC programs. These standards must be met to qualify for state cost-share funding. The standards set minimum thresholds for size, tillable acreage, soil quality, and the extent to which wetlands and steep slopes can exist on an applicant property. There is also a requirement that some degree of future development potential be exhibited on the farm based on the zoning used in the appraisals. There is no waiver provision for these standards.

The new regulations also mandate that for participation in the new County PIG program, each county must submit with its annual application for funding a list of targeted farms. A “targeted farm” is a specific property contained within an approved project area that a county may seek to solicit for preservation through the county planning incentive grant program. These are farms the County has identified as appropriate for preservation through its comprehensive planning process. The County’s list of targeted farms will be updated each year to reflect changes such as deletion of farms from the list that were successfully preserved during the previous year, or addition of new farms not previously targeted.

For targeted farms to receive SADC cost-share funding, the new regulations mandate that, in addition to meeting the minimum standards, they must also qualify as “eligible farms” (N.J.A.C. 2:76-17.2). An “eligible farm” is a targeted farm that has an individual rank score (pursuant to N.J.A.C. 2:76-6.16) that is equal to or greater than 70 percent of the county's average quality score of all farms granted preliminary approval by the Committee through the county easement purchase program and/or the county planning incentive grant program within the previous three fiscal years. The county’s average quality score will be provided by the SADC annually. Under special circumstances, as outlined at N.J.A.C. 2:76-17.9, the county may petition that these standards be waived for individual targeted farms. The purpose of these “eligible farm” criteria is to ensure that, in the absence of a statewide ranking of all farms that was used in the traditional county easement purchase program, counties continue to preserve farms that are representative of the quality of farms they had been preserving prior to the enactment of the new County Planning Incentive Grant rules.

**2. What if through the comprehensive planning process a county has included farms on the targeted farms list that do not meet SADC minimum quality standards?**

In some instances, farms that do not meet SADC standards for cost-share participation may be identified as important for preservation locally. For example, a small, lower quality farm could be a “hole in the donut” in a project area where all the surrounding land has already been preserved. In these cases, while the farm may have been included on the county’s targeted farms list, because the farm cannot meet the minimum quality standards, the SADC

will not provide cost-share funding toward the purchase of the easement. As such, local partners could still proceed to preserve the farm without state funding.

If, however, the farm DID meet the minimum quality standards, but did not meet the standards to be considered an “eligible farm,” the county could seek a waiver from the SADC to preserve the farm using state funds.

**3. What are the requirements for conducting the two required public meetings during the comprehensive planning process?**

As part of the comprehensive planning process, the SADC is requiring at least two public meetings – one early in the process to gather input and another later to review the draft plan. At a minimum, notice shall be provided to municipalities containing targeted farm areas at least 10 working days in advance of the meeting. It is recommended that notice also be provided to other interested parties, including the County Board of Agriculture, farmland-assessed property owners, municipal agriculture advisory committees and open space committees, chambers of commerce, etc., so that they may provide input on plan development.

**4. SADC guidelines require that County Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plans identify and describe project areas, including providing certain statistics regarding density and soil quality of targeted farms in the project area. Does the County have to use these statistics to “rank” project areas for purposes of prioritizing its acquisitions?**

No. N.J.A.C. 2:76-17.5 lists the necessary components to describe identified project areas. These summary findings are not required to be used as a basis for prioritization of the county’s list of targeted farms. These statistics do, however, become important when the county is competing for funds from the Competitive Grant Fund. There, the project area density and soil quality do become a significant factor in the SADC’s prioritization of farms for Competitive Grant Fund monies (see N.J.A.C. 2:76-17.14(e)).

**5. NJAC 2:76-17.6(b) states that “the county shall notify all municipalities in which targeted farms are located within a project area no later than 90 days prior to the date on which it submits its application to the Committee, and no less than 90 days prior to the December 15 application deadline.” Given that the planning process should inform the list of targeted farms, how is this possible?**

This year counties will be creating and/or updating their Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plans to conform to SADC rules and guidelines. Through this planning process, a list of targeted farms will be assembled following the identification of Agricultural Development Areas (ADAs) and project areas. September 15<sup>th</sup> is 90 days from the December 15 application deadline. For this first year, each county should have enough of this planning process complete by this date to be able to notify municipalities that project areas are being considered within their jurisdiction and that farms are being examined as possible targets for acquisition. Once the planning process is complete, a final list of targeted farms can be submitted for municipal review.

**6. If counties will be amending their ADA boundaries as part of this comprehensive planning process, must the SADC approve the amendment prior to plan submittal?**

ADA amendment review can be done as part of comprehensive farmland preservation plan approval. Separate SADC approval of the ADA will not be required.

**7. I'm having trouble on the economic development portion of the plan. What resources are available to help me with this section?**

A comprehensive strategy for county agricultural industry development will require consultation from a number of formal and informal sources. A good place to start is the NJDA 2007 Economic Development Strategies document. This document provides a list of both general and industry-specific strategies for New Jersey agriculture. It can be found at: <http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/conventions/2007/07EcoStrat.pdf>.

The Agricultural Smart Growth Plan for New Jersey (April 2006) is also a valuable resource. The Economic Development section of the plan summarizes issues of agricultural economic development and provides a more detailed list of objectives and strategies along with a "toolkit" for implementation strategies. It can be found at: <http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/pdf/smartgrowthplan.pdf>.

Aside from the CADB itself, County Boards of Agriculture and County Economic Development offices are also invaluable resources for local information and ideas. As agricultural economic development is a regional issue, coordination with these groups from adjacent counties is critical. Some counties have even sent mail surveys to farm-assessed property owners to find out where they get supplies, what is being grown, how they market their products and what resources are needed. There are also numerous resources from Rutgers University's Department of Agricultural, Food & Resource Economics and Rutgers Cooperative Extension.

If you have further questions, the primary contact for agricultural economic development at the Department of Agriculture is Logan Brown (609-292-8856). He is aware of the comprehensive planning process counties are undertaking and will be able to provide more information.

**8. I am having difficulty acquiring data to inform the water supply and demand discussion. What resources are available to help me with this section?**

There are a number of sources for water supply and demand data suggested by the Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Water Supply.

The DEP is currently in the process of updating its Statewide Water Supply Plan. The previous version from August 1996 is available, however, and can be a comprehensive source of information about water supply, availability and planning at the watershed level. The SADC has copies available upon request and the document is available for download at <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/watershedmgt/publications.htm>.

Water supply data on a county-wide basis is also available from the New Jersey Geological Survey in its Open File Report 00-1 – New Jersey Water Withdrawals 1990-1996. The SADC has a copy of this available for review. This document is available for purchase at <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/njgs/pricelst/njgsrprt.htm#ofr>.

County Agriculture Extension Agents work directly with farmers to assess operation needs and can be a great source of information on local water usage. Newspapers and other local information sources also can be searched for the latest updates on water issues.

**9. At what point is County Agriculture Development Board and County Planning Board approval of the plan required?**

CADB and County Planning Board approval is required following completion of the plan. Given there is a period of plan review by the SADC following submittal (N.J.A.C. 2:76-17.7,) counties should hold these approvals until the SADC has issued notice of completeness and guideline consistency.

**10. What happens if my county submits its plan by the December 15<sup>th</sup> deadline, but we believe continued work on a section will be necessary after the deadline?**

Each year, County Planning Incentive Grant applications must be received no later than December 15th. Several counties have questioned whether, after submitting the plan on December 15th, they will be permitted to provide additional information or improve a section of the plan after the deadline.

As per N.J.A.C. 2:76-17.7, the SADC will have up to 60 days following receipt of the county's application to review and provide notification of application approval or conditional approval. Notification of a conditional approval will include a listing of application deficiencies. Therefore, if upon SADC review, the SADC agrees the section(s) in question needs additional work, the county will have 60 days from receiving the notification of deficiency to complete the work.

**11. If work on the Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan continues beyond the December 15, 2007 deadline, or a county decides to submit plans for December 15, 2008 instead, is it possible to amend the Grant Agreement so that this work is eligible for SADC grant funding?**

Yes. The SADC is interested in counties doing the best job possible on their Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plans. We understand that some counties may have to do additional work after the December 15<sup>th</sup> submittal of their plans in order to obtain SADC plan approval. We also understand it is possible a small number of counties may choose to pursue the traditional County Easement Purchase program this fall and develop plans for submittal by December 15, 2008 instead.

Cost-share grant funding will be able to be applied to all work performed prior to the SADC's ultimate approval of the plan (which is scheduled for March/April of 2008). Grant funding will also be available to counties that choose to develop plans for December 2008, instead of 2007. Counties with grant agreements that have already been executed may

apply for this extension in writing prior to the December 15, 2007 deadline contained in the existing grant agreements.

**12. SADC regulations (N.J.A.C. 2:76-17.6) outline the required contents of an annual application to the County PIG program. Will there be forms from the SADC to formalize these application submittals?**

Yes. The SADC is developing two standardized forms for counties to submit as part of their annual PIG application. The first form will be used to summarize findings and important elements of the County Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan. The second will be used to provide project area summaries. These forms will be distributed well in advance of the December 15<sup>th</sup> submittal deadline.

**13. What are the digital data-sharing requirements for program participation?**

The SADC is requiring that each participating county and municipality provide digital files of all Agricultural Development Areas, Project Areas and Targeted Farm list properties identified as part of the comprehensive planning process. These files should be provided in an ArcGIS format, drawn in New Jersey State Plane Coordinate System coordinates (feet) and projected in the North American Datum of 1983 (NAD83). These files are to be transmitted with the planning incentive grant application on a Windows compatible 3.5-inch diskette or Windows compatible CD ROM.

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*For answers to any additional questions, please contact SADC staffers Steve Bruder or Tim Brill at 609-984-2504. If additional frequently asked questions are raised, answers will be posted to the SADC's website at: [www.state.nj.us/agriculture/sadc/pigprogram.htm](http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/sadc/pigprogram.htm)*

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