



NEWS

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Landmark Deal to Preserve Nearly 1,900 Acres in Salem County

Acquisition Will Be Largest in History of Farmland Preservation Program

Agriculture Secretary Charles M. Kuperus today joined other state, county and local leaders in announcing an agreement to permanently preserve nearly 1,900 acres of farmland in Mannington Township, Salem County, through a cooperative effort among the State Agriculture Development Committee, the Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres Program, Salem County and Mannington Township. The agreement represents the largest acquisition in the history of New Jersey's Farmland Preservation Program.



“This truly is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be able to preserve such a sizable portion of South Jersey’s agricultural land base,” said Kuperus, who chairs the State Agriculture Development Committee that administers the Farmland Preservation Program. “We’re thrilled this land will remain productive for future generations of farmers and for all the New Jerseyans who will be able to continue to enjoy the fruits of their labors.”

“It is exactly this kind of acquisition that epitomizes the unwavering support the people of New Jersey have given open-space preservation over several decades. I think it is important to acknowledge their generosity and their vision as we celebrate our latest success today,” DEP Commissioner Lisa P. Jackson said.

The SADC will purchase the development rights on approximately 1,770 acres of farmland. When landowners sell the development rights, they continue to own the land but it is permanently deed restricted for agricultural use. The Department of Environmental Protection’s Green Acres

Program will purchase outright another approximately 120 acres, which will be managed by the DEP's Division of Fish and Wildlife as part of the Salem River Wildlife Recreation Area.

The land is owned by Salem Farms Corporation, formed in the 1940s by Jack Seabrook who at 91 has a lifetime history of contributing to New Jersey agriculture. One of his first jobs was as a supervisor for the South Jersey Soil Conservation District in the 1930s. As president of Seabrook Farms, in the 1950s, Mr. Seabrook and his brothers managed the world's largest farming and freezing operation, packing the produce from more than 50,000 acres in a Deerfield freezing plant that itself covered 23 acres.

Mr. Seabrook began purchasing land in nearby Mannington as far back as 1940. In 1959, Seabrook Farms was sold to outside interests, and he moved his family to Mannington to be closer to Philadelphia, where he built a second career in international business.

"I may have been flying all over Europe, Asia and the Middle East, but my heart remained in New Jersey, surrounded by those vegetable fields," said Mr. Seabrook. "It gives me great comfort to know those fields – some of the best land for farming in all of New Jersey – will be protected for future generations of New Jersey farmers."

The total cost of the preservation project is \$15.5 million. The SADC will pay \$10.45 million toward the \$13.95 million cost of the development rights on the approximately 1,770 acres, with Salem County contributing an additional \$3.1 million and Mannington Township \$400,000. The Green Acres Program is purchasing the approximately 120 acres for \$1.55 million.

"Farming has a rich legacy in Salem County, and to preserve such valuable, productive farmland is crucial in our state," said Agricultural Chairman Assemblyman Doug Fisher. "The Seabrook family has made great contributions to agriculture, and it's wonderful that dedication extends to preserving this land. Majority Leader Stephen Sweeney, Deputy Speaker Assemblyman Burzichelli and I thank all the partners involved in this monumental preservation project."

"We are pleased to have teamed up with the State and Mannington Township to preserve this beautiful piece of land," said Salem County Freeholder Director Lee R. Ware. "We believe this project to be vital to preserving our County's way of life by keeping it out of the hands of developers. This land will be farmland for all time and enjoyed for generations to come. We are proud of this project that keeps with our commitment to keep Salem County the Garden Spot of the Garden State."

"Mannington Township is excited to work with the State Agriculture Development Committee and other partners to make preservation of this land a reality," said Mayor Donald Asay. "This project supports our ongoing efforts to maintain our successful agrarian community and protect environmentally important wetlands. It ensures Mannington Township will remain a great place to raise a family, farm or visit for years to come."

More than 1,700 farms covering approximately 170,000 acres have been preserved statewide since the inception of the Farmland Preservation Program.

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