



# *Township of Hillsborough*

COUNTY OF SOMERSET  
MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
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## **HILLSBOROUGH PLANNING & ZONING DEPARTMENT**

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### **SUSTAINABLE JERSEY RECERTIFICATION ACTION: FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLANS FILE 1: COPY OF FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN**

*Instructions: Provide a copy of the Municipal Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan that meets the plan component requirements.*

Hillsborough Township adopted its farmland preservation plan in 2009. The plan was prepared in accordance with State Agriculture Development Committee guidelines.

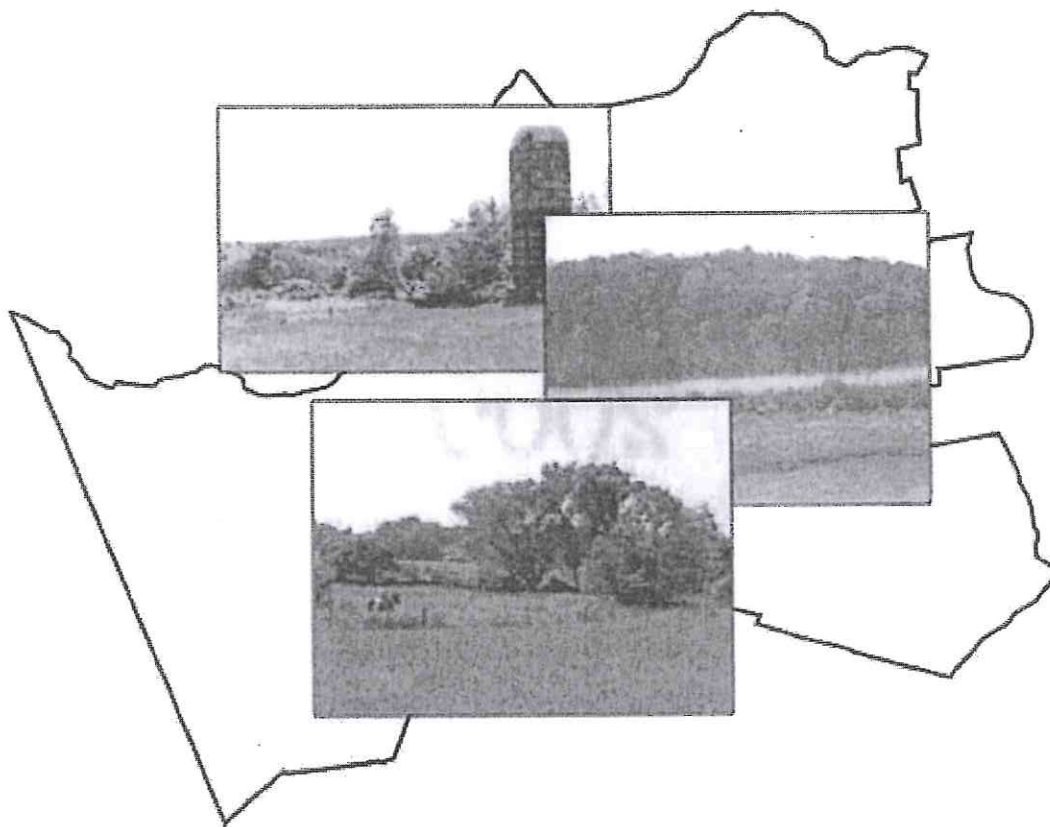
Attachment:

- Township of Hillsborough Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan 2009 – Partial (Note: Copy of plan available at the request of Sustainable Jersey)

Township of Hillsborough

**COMPREHENSIVE  
FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN**

2009



*Prepared by*

**D&R GREENWAY  
LAND TRUST**



*For*

**Hillsborough Township  
Somerset County, NJ**

COMPREHENSIVE  
FARMLAND  
PRESERVATION PLAN  
2009

for

Township of Hillsborough

County of Somerset

# COMPREHENSIVE FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN 2009

## Township of Hillsborough County of Somerset

*Produced by:*

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*In partnership with*

**The Land Conservancy of New Jersey**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Agriculture continues to be a vital, active and viable industry in Hillsborough Township. Farmland defines the rural history and character of the community. Farming is deeply integrated of the rural history and scenic landscape of Hillsborough Township and greatly valued by its residents. The agricultural land in Hillsborough Township borders the scenic Sourland Mountains in the Amwell Valley and creates a rural buffer for the watersheds of the Raritan, Neshanic, and Millstone Rivers. Despite the rapid increase in development and loss of the agricultural land base in the region, Hillsborough Township has been a leader in planning and implementation of strategies to retain agricultural land base and support the existing farmers in the township. The township's farmers have proven to be innovative in adapting to the changing land use but their future depends on all levels of government working together to preserve both the land base as well as the existing local farmers and the business of agriculture in the region.

Hillsborough Township is the premiere agricultural community in Somerset County. At 54.7 square miles, or 35,008 acres, Hillsborough Township is the largest municipality in Somerset County. According to the 2004 Farmland Assessment report, the township had the highest number of farmland assessed acreage in the county, 12,226 acres, representing 28.4% of the County's 43,040 acres of farmland assessed property. In addition, 7,930 of the township's total farmland assessed acres were devoted to active agricultural use, representing 30% of all active agricultural land (26,421 acres) in Somerset County. There is still considerable agricultural infrastructure and an active and vital agricultural community in the township and the Amwell Valley region. Hillsborough Township still retains large contiguous productive farmland areas with 12,226 acres of important farmland soils currently under farmland assessment. Since the inception of the Farmland Preservation Program, Hillsborough Township has preserved over 2,411 acres of farmland, nearly double the acreage preserved individually by Montgomery and Bedminster Townships the second and third ranking township in Somerset County with respect to preserved farmland.

A shrinking land base and changing market conditions have had dramatic effects on Hillsborough Township's and Somerset County's agricultural industry. Rising land prices have persuaded many farmers to produce more input-intensive goods, such as nursery and pick-your-own products, which yield higher cash flows and require less land. Consequently, these products now account for the majority of agricultural sales in Somerset County. Also, the average farm size has decreased while the per-acre cost of agricultural production has increased. These trends highlight the difficulties faced by



producers of Somerset County's traditional goods – dairy and livestock – whose land-intensive operations have encountered rising costs, stiffening competition from other land uses, and falling dairy prices. The combination of these factors has made the practice of traditional agriculture in Somerset County more difficult and has quickened the pace of development on farmlands throughout the County.

Land use planning efforts at the state, county, and local levels have aimed to sustain Somerset County's agricultural lands and industries. The *State Development and Redevelopment Plan* designates 71,658 acres (37%) of Somerset County as Rural or Environmentally-sensitive lands, and encourages the clustering of development within defined "centers" in order to preserve rural environs in these areas. The *Highlands Regional Master Plan* affirms Somerset County's agricultural importance by placing large portions of it within Agricultural Priority Areas. Somerset County's planning efforts support agriculture as well. The *2001 Somerset County Agriculture Retention and Development Master Plan* includes a comprehensive analysis of the County's agricultural resources and provides substantive recommendations for ensuring the County's agricultural viability. Somerset County's upcoming Smart Growth Strategic Plan supports the "centers" concept as a mechanism to maintain its agricultural and natural lands. At the municipal level, many Somerset County towns have implemented cluster ordinances and designated special resource zones in which rural and natural conservation objectives are paramount.

#### ***Somerset County and Hillsborough Township and Farmland Preservation Goals***

Since its inception in 1983, the Somerset CADB has helped preserve 6,710 acres, with an additional 808 acres pending applications. The 2002 Census of Agriculture identified 36,237 acres in Somerset County as land in farms. Thus, 29,527 acres of farmland remain unprotected in Somerset County. Based upon availability of existing funding, utilization of an array of preservation tools and funding sources, Somerset County would be able to preserve an additional 10,000 acres over the next ten years:

Existing preserved acreage:	6,710 acres
One year acreage target:	1,000 acres
Five year acreage target:	5,000 acres
Ten year acreage target:	10,000 acres

Since the inception of the Farmland Preservation Program, Hillsborough Township has preserved 2,367 acres. A realistic goal would be to preserve an additional 1,000 acres in the next 10 years. Preserving the entire acreage of targeted

Existing preserved acreage:	2,367 acres
One year target:	100 acres
Five year target:	500 acres
Ten year target:	1,000 acres



### *Somerset County Farmland Preservation Project Areas*

This Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan Update also identifies thirteen project areas in which future farmland preservation efforts will be concentrated:

- Millstone Valley East
- Millstone Valley West
- Northern Bernards
- Eastern Montgomery
- Pike Run
- Bedens Brook
- Bedens Brook East
- Neshanic Valley North
- Neshanic Valley South
- Upper Raritan East
- Upper Raritan West
- Warren
- Bernards Dead River

### *Hillsborough Township Farmland Preservation Project Areas*

Farmland in Hillsborough Township falls into portions of the Somerset County's Neshanic Valley and Millstone Valley ADA's. Hillsborough Township has three approved PIG project areas; the Amwell Valley Project Area consisting of 2,269 acres, the Mill Land Project Area consisting of 782.1 acres and the South project area consisting of 703.29 acres. This current draft plan has updated the three PIG Project application to comply with new SADC rules and guidelines regarding County and Municipal Minimum Eligibility Criteria.

#### *Amwell Valley PIG Project Area*

The Amwell Valley PIG Project Area consists of 2269.08 acres and is located in the western portion of Hillsborough Township. Within this project area there are 56 total farms, 8 preserved farms totaling 646.33 acres and 23 targeted farms totaling 1024.48 acres. The Amwell Valley project is the largest PIG project in Hillsborough Township. In this project area there are 764.34 acres and 16 farms which meet both the Minimum Eligibility Criteria for soils and tillable land.

#### *Mill Lane PIG Project Area*

The Mill Lane PIG Project Area consists of 782.1 acres and is located in the north-central portion of Hillsborough Township. Within this project area there are 16 total farms, 4 preserved farms totaling 348.0 acres and 6 targeted farms totaling 339 acres. In this project area there are 284.47 acres and 8 farms which meet both the Minimum Eligibility Criteria for soils and tillable land. The entire western end of the Mill Land PIG Project is preserved. All remaining target farms (Doyle, PID Associates and Dorell) are concentrated at the east end of the project area.

### *South PIG Project Area*

The South PIG Project Area consists of 808.93 acres and is located in the southeastern portion of Hillsborough Township. Within this project area there are 17 total farms, 7 preserved farms totaling 417.12 acres and 7 targeted farms totaling 262.2 acres. In this project area there are 467.67 acres and 8 farms which meet both the Minimum Eligibility Criteria for soils and tillable land.

To complete the entire acreage in its three approved PIG Project Areas, it is projected that Hillsborough Township will need to spend in excess of \$33 million. This total amount will exceed the total funding that the township can support from its required portion of the total cost share derived from projected tax revenue. Therefore creative use of all possible leveraging strategies to expand dedicated funding will be required to preserve the existing list of targeted farms.

### *Economic and Development and Conservation Strategies*

Somerset County and Hillsborough Township are committed to sustaining its farmers as well as preserving its farmland. The county endorses the following economic development and conservation strategies aimed at maintaining local agricultural productivity:

- Institutional support – provide local farmers access to educational programs and offer public advertisements of farm stands, markets, fairs, and other agricultural campaigns. Also, facilitate inter-agency coordination between State, County and municipal agencies on agricultural initiatives.
- Branding – offer local farmers information about Jersey Fresh, Jersey Grown, and other branding efforts that try to increase consumption of local farm products.
- Public outreach – educate County residents about local farming, and work with municipalities in order to minimize right-to-farm conflicts.
- Regulatory flexibility – allow farm operations the opportunity to explore potentially lucrative projects while enforcing prohibitive legal mandates on a cost-benefit basis.
- Business partnerships – encourage cooperation between local businesses and farmers in order to make their products available to local consumers. Provide farmers with representation in the County's economic development bodies. Ensure that farmers can obtain health and other forms of insurance.
- Innovative practices – provide information about non-traditional agriculture such as community support agriculture (CSA's), farming coops, incubator farms, and niche markets (organics, wine).
- Conservation - Ensure that farmers have knowledge of and access to federal conservation programs such as WHIP, CREP, and EQIP. Provide assistance to farmers in the development of safe and humane wildlife management strategies.

### *Conclusion*

Agriculture in Hillsborough Township is facing extreme pressures from economics, land development, and erosion of agricultural land base. However, the strong identity of the

community with agriculture and repeated demonstrations of proactive planning and support for farmland preservation as well as the capabilities of local farmers to evolve with changes in the region creates strong potential for a viable agricultural industry in Hillsborough Township in the future.