

Burlington County Commissioners approve preservation of four farms totaling 256 acres

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For The Central Record

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File photo of the Burlington County Agricultural Center in Moorestown. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

By [For The Central Record](#) |

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MOUNT HOLLY – The Burlington County Commissioners have given the go-ahead to permanently preserve another 256 acres of farmland.

The Commissioners voted unanimously recently to approve four new properties to enter the County's Farmland Preservation Program.

Through the program, the County makes offers to purchase the development rights for the properties to have them deed restricted to remain in agriculture. The farmers will continue to retain ownership of the land.

The approved properties include two parcels totaling 178 acres at the Emmons Farm, a former dairy farm off Pointville Road in Pemberton Township that borders Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. The multigenerational farm was one of the last New Jersey dairy

farms to bottle their own milk until the farm closed its dairy store and sold its herd of cows in 2004. The land has continued to be farmed and is currently leased to a tenant farmer for grain production.

The other approved farms are the 62-acre Stevens Farm in Tabernacle, and the 16-acre Whalen property in Shamong.

The Stevens Farm is a former blueberry farm that is now leased to a tenant farmer for vegetable production.

The Whalen property was recently acquired by the family to incorporate into their large blueberry and cranberry growing operation. The family's other adjacent lands are also preserved by the County.

The addition of all four parcels will bring the total acreage of preserved farmland in Burlington County up to 62,574 acres, which ranks No. 1 in New Jersey and in the top 10 nationally.

"The first farm to be preserved in New Jersey was here in Burlington County and we're proud to be a national leader in total acres preserved," said Commissioner Linda Hynes, the Board's liaison to the Department of Resource Conservation. "Every acre we preserve helps maintain our county's scenic landscape and keeps farming alive and viable for current and future generations, so we're excited to have these farms enter the preservation program."

All four properties were recommended by the Burlington County Agricultural Development Board and qualify for state funding to help cover the costs for acquiring the land development rights.

The two Emmons Farms properties are also within a five-mile military buffer zone around the Joint Base, which makes them eligible for Department of Defense funding to cover up to 50 percent of the preservation costs.

The buffer zone is important because it helps minimize security issues and limits development and land-use conflicts near the military base.

Since 2008, the county has preserved a total of 32 farms totaling 2,229 acres in the buffer zone.

"With more than 40,000 service members and civilian employees, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst is unquestionably a critical asset both for our nation's security and for Burlington County and New Jersey's overall economy," Hynes said. "By partnering with the military to preserve these farms, we're able to help the base and our farming communities."