



BERKS COUNTY *agricultural land* PRESERVATION BOARD

Berks County Agricultural Center
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www.berkspa.gov/departments/agriculture

County Commissioners:

Christian Y. Leinbach, Chair
Michael S. Rivera
Dante Santoni, Jr.

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Louise A. Swartley

Ex Officio:

Robert C. Ziegenfus, Ph.D.

Solicitor:

Mark R. Sprow, Esq.

Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board Meeting September 24, 5:30 p.m. MINUTES

A regularly scheduled meeting of the Berks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board was held at the Berks County Agricultural Center on Wednesday, September 24, 2025, at 5:30 p.m.

Board members present: Gregg Eshelman, Steve Mohn, Clyde Myers, Louise Swartley, Dave Phillips, Kim McGrath, and Jeremy Meck.

Staff present: Kim Fies, Executive Director, Amanda Burkard-Sell, Deputy Director, Mary Shah, Agriculture Program Manager, Rachel Painter, Office Support IV, Emily Goense, Agriculture Program Coordinator.

In attendance: Mark Sprow, Esq. Special Counsel for the Board.

Public: None.

Gregg Eshelman, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:36 p.m.

I. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS — None.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: A motion was made to approve the minutes of the August 27, 2025, meeting. (L. Swartley, D. Phillips)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

III. STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION UPDATES

- A. Burkard-Sell pointed out some changes: Under letter K, there are now only four farms for October State Board meeting, dockets #2002, #2401, #2402, and #2411. Docket #2410 has been moved to letter L, preparing for the December State Board meeting due to some timing issues with paperwork.
- Docket #2509 was moved to letter N; landowners have accepted their offer.
- Under letter O, docket #2521, A. Burkard-Sell stated it was accidentally left off.

- 5 appraisals in Executive Session.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

A. 2025 LESA Ranking Selection Update

- A. Burkard-Sell stated that after last Board meeting, the selection of one additional farm was possible since docket #1715 was withdrawn by the Board at the last meeting.
- Staff was able to go down to #30 and select docket #0710, however, landowner withdrew from selection process.
- A. Burkard-Sell stated that there are not enough funds to go down any further, ranking is stopping at #29 for 2025 selection process. A. Burkard-Sell let the Board know that there is not enough of a financial cushion with the remaining \$44,385.69 and that money will be floated to next year's selection process.
- K. McGrath inquired as to what amount of funds is comfortable, and A. Burkard-Sell stated that \$50,000 is a number that staff feels is secure, with the possible costs of surveying the farm.

B. 2026 Board Meeting Schedule Confirmation

- K. Fies noted that because of the construction occurring in this building, rooms must be booked in advance.
- K. Fies advised moving the November 2026 meeting date to November 18, 2026, so as not to conflict with the Thanksgiving holiday. The December 2026 meeting was left as it stands, on December 30, 2026.

C. Fall Pending Legislation Update

- A. Burkard-Sell reminded the Board that the legislation information went out with the Board meeting notice with proposed House Bills that are currently in process.
- As part of the Pennsylvania Farmland Preservation Association conference attended by Department of Ag staff twice a year, to get an idea of how County Boards feel about pending legislation so PFPA can take an official opinion.
- House Bill 1584 is for the preservation of small pieces of farmland next to other preserved land, as well as annexation from one preserved farm to another any piece less than 10 acres. The Board previously supported a previous version of this bill.
- House Bill 1059 is for the purchase of agricultural conservation easement, directing funding for land trust, to purchase easements out of the State left over funding. The Board opposed this bill.
- A. Burkard-Sell answered K. McGrath's question about why the Board did not support House Bill 1059 by stating that the money not spent by the counties that goes back to the State is currently reallocated back to the counties. With House Bill 1059, this money would not be reallocated and would instead be a fund that land trusts could tap into.

Motion: A motion was made to send letters to local legislators supporting House Bill 1584, and in opposition of House Bill 1059. (G. Eshelman, S. Mohn)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

D. Continued Stormwater Discussion

- G. Eshelman stated that he was the one who asked that this be added the meeting agenda, so as to discuss that stormwater has become more of an issue for buildings being constructed.
- K. Fies stated that staff is late in the game when it comes to ag structures, due to the Department not getting notification until after it's been designed and submitted to the township and County's planning commissions. K. Fies has asked the Conservation District to share with the Ag Department as soon as they get a plan in.
- Further discussion was held as to how stormwater management affects designs and the building of structures as it relates to ag land and keeping it from being made unusable or destroyed.
- G. Eshelman asked that staff draft a letter asking that the Board gets a notification before final approval to allow for an alternative solution to be suggested to address stormwater requirements.

Motion: A motion was made to prepare a letter to the Berks County Conservation District asking for notification when larger agricultural buildings are going to be built. (J. Meck, L. Swartley)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried.

E. Weber Farm Celebration Recap

- G. Eshelman let the Board know that the monies sent by B.A.R.N. was utilized well. G. Eshelman was in attendance, as well as K. Fies and A. Burkard-Sell. G. Eshelman complimented the celebration.
- Weber Farm has been in operation for 240 years.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Conveyance Report

- M. Shah stated that the properties under letter A, five farms transferred in compliance, referring to settlements #265.0, #410.0, #99.0, #407.0, and #828.0
- The last one, settlement #828, also went from the estate to the children.
- The two farms under letter B, Concerns Noted, settlement #381.0 did not have deed of easement attached and is being corrected.
- Settlement #448 is in the process of being corrected. K. Fies left a message for landowner but has not heard back at time of meeting.

B. PENNVEST — AquaPA Request

- Application regarding the Meadowbrook Well Treatment Station in Washington Township.
- The project is a PFAS treatment project, which is the usage of Granular Activated Carbon (GAC) Units to absorb PFOS and PFOA compounds.

- Maintains the permitted capacity of 125 gallons permitted, located on the property of the existing station, and will be located in previously disturbed areas that are well maintained.
 - No additional land to be required, property is not in effective ag zoning.
- C. PENNVEST — Pennsylvania American Water Request
- Existing wastewater collection system in Exeter Township is aging, and assessment conducted concluded that aging terracotta pipes are the deficiency.
 - Existing pipes will be lined.
 - No additional land to be acquired, areas are not in effective ag zoning.

Motion: A motion was made to recommend the proposed PENNVEST project to upgrade the Meadowbrook Well Treatment Station. (K. McGrath, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: A motion was made to recommend the proposed PENNVEST project to upgrade the PAWC Exeter collection system. (K. McGrath, J. Meck)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

VI. DEPARTMENTAL REPORT

A. Upcoming Events

- K. Fies let the Board know about a modification request for an ag structure from Gerald and Sheila Hoover, 88'x450' layer house for approximately 50,000 birds, a 50'x50' egg room, and 88'x40' manure storage, on a preserved farm in Jefferson Township.
- Staff is working with the County Planning Department to create guidance on agritainment/agritourism as it relates to the easement program and working with municipalities to provide zoning consideration guidance and continuing to work with municipalities for notifications when zoning permits are submitted for preserved farms.
- K. Fies discussed her attendance at a joint comprehensive plan meeting with Richmond, Maiden creek, and Fleetwood Borough.
- Discussion was held about possible tax breaks for the subsequent owners of preserved farms.
- K. Fies recapped the Farm Market Festival on the 6th of September, the Weber celebration, and the Oley Fair.
- K. Fies also let that Board know that, as per a post on Facebook, Kurtland Farms has withdrawn all interest in their digester project.

VII. CITIZEN COMMENT / BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR — None.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion: A motion was made to approve offering the cap of \$2,800 an acre to docket #2510, #2511, #2513, #2209, and #2514. (J. Meck, K. McGrath)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 7:05 PM. (K. McGrath, S. Mohn)

Discussion: None.

Vote: Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Rachel Painter
Office Support IV