

Regional Comparisons from Ohio's 2002-04 Agricultural Easement Purchase Program

by

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INTRODUCTION

The Office of Farmland Preservation (OFP) of the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) requested a regional analysis of the applicant data for the Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (AEPP). The purpose of this evaluation is to review the ranking scale to report regional results for the first three years of the statewide program.

The Ohio AEPP is a statewide program, funded by the Clean Ohio Fund. This Fund was approved by voters in November 2000, and included \$25 million bond funding for farmland preservation. The funds would be used to purchase perpetual agricultural easements from landowners. Eligibility criteria include at least a 25% donation of the value of the easement. Restrictions about the maximum payments per landowner were in effect each year, as well as maximum payments per county per year.

The AEPP established a ranking system to select applicants for funding. This ranking system was applied statewide. The ranking system experienced minor changes from year to year. Applicants work with landowners to apply for the funding from this program. Applicants included counties, townships, and non-profit organizations such as land trusts

Data from each applicant were collected by ODA for the first three years of Ohio's AEPP. The following analysis indicates that there were 442 applicants for the 2002 program, 289 applicants for the 2003 program, and 268 applicants for the 2004 program.

An evaluation of the ranking system with regional comparisons was requested by ODA, Office of Farmland Preservation. This evaluation was requested to determine if the ranking system gave advantage or disadvantage by geographic regions of the state. It would also allow evaluation of increasing or decreasing trends during this three-year period by geographic regions of the state and for all applicants.

REGIONS

For this Regional Analysis, the following three regions were defined by OFP/OFP:

- “Northeast” (NE) includes Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, Trumbull, and Wayne Counties.
- “Northwest” (NW) includes Defiance, Fulton, Hancock, Henry, Lucas, Ottawa, Putnam, Sandusky, Seneca, Williams, and Wood counties.

- “Southwest” (SW) includes Butler, Champaign, Clinton, Clark, Darke, Greene, Madison, Miami, Montgomery, Preble, and Warren counties.
- “OTHER” includes all other Ohio counties.

ODA/OFP selected the counties for each of the three regions based on their familiarity with the applicants and the programs in each county. Based on these boundaries, the NE Region had 202 applicants during the three years and had 5 easements purchased. The NW Region had 150 applicants and 16 easements funded. The SW Region had 303 applicants and 24 easements. There were 344 applicants in OTHER counties and 6 easements.

RESULTS

Based on the definition of regions and the ranking system that was in effect for the first three years of the AEPP, average points for each question were calculated by region. Table 1 shows results for 2002, Table 2 shows results for 2003, and Table 3 shows results for 2004. Each table shows Ranking System questions applied that year, together with the maximum number of points allowed.

Following are some summary comments or observations from observation of the data:

- The Tier I total score increased each year, by 12.18 points from 02 to 03, and by 4.47 points from 03 to 04. NW had the highest regional average in 02, and SW had the highest average for 03 and 04. NE had the lowest regional score in 02 and OTHER had the lowest regional score for 03 and 04. The difference between the highest region and the lowest region ranged from 16.77 in 2002, 11.77 points in 2003, and 17.16 points in 2004
- Average acres per applicant was largest for applicants in SW for all 3 years. Lowest parcel size was NW in 02 and 03 and NE for 04.
- There are three ranking questions related to proximity to other protected lands. The number of points varied from 02 to 03 to 04. NE ranked highest for three of the nine options, NW ranked highest for three, SW ranked highest for three.
- For the question related to conservation plan, statewide points decreased from 02 to 03 and then increased to about the same level in 04. In 03 and 04, all three regions had nearly identical scores. OTHER ranked lowest for 03 and 04.
- There were five questions used to score proximity to water, sewer, frontage, highways, and other housing. For these 15 categories, NE ranked highest 3 times, NW ranked highest 6 times, SW ranked highest 3 times, and OTHER ranked highest 3 times. There were changes for maximum points for some of these questions from 02 to 03 to 04.
- There were 7 questions for zoning and planning for 02, 5 questions for 03, and 4 questions for 04. NE ranked highest for 2 of the 16 questions, NW ranked highest for 5 questions, SW ranked highest for 7 of the questions, and OTHER ranked highest for 2 questions. (Note when a tie occurred, a half point was counted.) A tentative observation is that there is less variation in 04 than in 02 related to this range of questions. In all years, there is wide variation between regions for the question about zoning for agriculture, offering more points for SW. NE improved in 04 related to the zoning question.

- Related to the MSA question, NE ranked highest and OTHER ranked lowest each year. The number of points changed in 04.
- Related to the Agricultural District question, the number of points changed and there is little variation in the response. NE ranked highest in each year.
- For the question about historic status, there was a different region ranked highest each year. In 04, SW (generally) scored one point higher than other regions. In 02, the average points for each region were nearly equal.
- Average local match points increased from 1.7 in 02 to 4.4 in 03 to 7.8 in 04. The score increased each year for NE, SW and OTHER regions. SW ranked 4th in 02 and 1st in 04. NE ranked 1st in 02 and 3rd in 04.
- Average soils points were highest for applicants in NW all 3 years. Lowest points in NE in 02 and OTHER for 03 and 04. Average soils scores increased each year overall and for each region. The largest increase was in NE.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this report was to report factual information about Ohio's AEPP during the first three years of the program. It is expected that landowners, applicants, and others will benefit from this report.

There is a learning curve related to this program by the applications to gain funding from this program. This learning curve is shown by higher overall scores, especially for questions with higher possible points. Higher scores might result from

- (a) Careful screening by applicants so that local applicants only forwarded applications for farms with higher points. This might follow efforts to limit staff time for this effort, or set other priorities.
- (b) Higher scores might also result from actions taken at the farm level or local community level to improve the likelihood of applicants to gain points from that action. An example might include designation of unique soils or changes in zoning or comprehensive plans. There was clearly a response by applicants to offer higher local match to gain points for this ranking system.

Ohio Department of Agriculture, Office of Farmland Preservation, provided funding to support this project. Results of this analysis were originally presented at an October 2004 meeting of the Ohio Farmland Preservation Advisory Board. Broad references to this report were made at the December 7, 2004 Farmland Preservation Summit. The author thanks ODA/OFP for their interest in strengthening the program and for support of this project.

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Table 1: Average Ranking System Points for Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program, 2002.

	Max Pts.	Statewide n=442	NE n=133	NW n=63	SW n=69	Other n=177
Acres per Applicant		142.11	126.03	115.06	187.81	146.01
B-Land protected by easement	10	1.07	1.11	0.16	1.94	1.02
B-Multiplier	1	0.17	0.16	0.04	0.3	0.16
B-Total: Land Protected by Easement	10	0.69	0.73	0.09	1.35	0.63
B-Non-easement Protected land	5	1.98	3.07	0.67	1.8	1.7
B-Multiplier	1	0.36	0.45	0.26	0.24	0.37
B-Total: Non-easement Protected Land	5	1.21	1.86	0.42	0.84	1.13
B-Potential Permanently Protected Farmland	5	2.43	2.3	2.79	2.2	2.48
B-Multiplier	1	0.5	0.52	0.56	0.43	0.49
B-Total Potential Permanently Protected	5	1.8	1.81	2.34	1.43	1.76
C-Conservation plan/best mgt. practices	5	4.08	2.67	4.6	4.71	4.71
D1-Sewer	4	2.53	2.26	2.48	2.83	2.64
D2-Water	2	1.02	0.96	0.93	1.2	1.03
D3-Road frontage	4	2.15	2.05	2.29	2.16	2.18
D4-Highway intersection	6	2.15	2.32	2.35	1.91	2.03
D5-Non-farm homes w/ in 1 mi. radius	4	1.75	1.5	2.37	1.18	1.94
E1-Comprehensive plan	2	1.77	1.59	1.97	2	1.76
E2-Plan less than 7yrs. old	4	3.06	2.86	4	3.48	2.71
E3-Designated Ag. area	4	3.45	3.49	3.56	3.65	3.3
E4-Zoned for Ag.	3	1.84	0.9	2.67	2.74	1.9
E5-Zoning one house	3	0.03	0.02	0	1.75	0.05
E6-Inconsistencies	2	1.48	1.02	1.68	1.91	1.59
E7-Inonsistenccies 2	2	1.5	1.07	1.68	1.88	1.6
F1-MSA score	2	1.26	1.4	1.37	1.3	1.1
F2-Ag. district	2	1.77	1.81	1.68	1.8	1.75
F3-Historical status	1	0.23	0.16	0.25	0.23	0.27
F4-Local match	10	1.7	1.11	5.83	0.36	1.14
Soils	20	10.89	8.84	14.64	12.33	10.55
Tier I Total	100	46.56	40.41	57.18	51.04	45.68

Table 2: Average Ranking System Points for Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program, 2003.

	Max Pts.	Statewide n=289	NE n=45	NW n=46	SW n=107	Other n=91
Acres per Applicant		167.99	130.21	129.86	193.13	176.4
B1-Land protected by easement	5	1	1.25	0.64	1.52	0.46
B2-Non-easement protected land	5	1.82	2.42	0.81	2.34	1.42
B3a-Potential permanently protected	5	2.78	1.86	2.59	3.21	2.84
B3b-Larger farm	2.5	0.09	0.14	0	0.08	0.11
C-Conservation plan	5	3.45	3.71	3.85	3.73	2.79
D1-Sewer	4	2.93	2.62	2.8	2.88	3.22
D2-Water	2	1.31	1.09	1.39	1.37	1.32
D3-Highway intersection	6	2.42	2.87	2.59	2.16	2.43
D4-Road frontage	4	2.45	2	2.61	2.38	2.67
D5-Non-farm homes	4	2.85	2.67	3.37	2.86	2.68
E1-Comprehensive plan	4	3.82	4	4	3.78	3.69
E2- Inconsistencies	4	3.46	3.47	4	3.59	3.03
E3-Inconsistencies 2	4	3.72	3.91	3.74	3.63	3.74
E4-Zoned for Ag.	3	2.37	1.53	1.96	2.8	2.47
E5-Zoning house/acres	5	1.14	0.33	0	2.94	0.02
F1-MSA score	2	1.31	1.53	1.43	1.26	1.21
F2-Ag. district	3	2.83	3	2.67	2.83	2.84
F3-Historical status	5	0.67	1.22	0.54	0.79	0.33
F4-Local match	10	4.41	4.24	4.83	5.57	2.91
Soils	20	13.88	13.21	15.44	14.7	12.46
Total Tier I	100	58.74	57.08	59.26	64.41	52.64

Table 3: Average Ranking System Points for Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program, 2004.

	Max pts.	Statewide n=268	NE n=24	NW n=41	SW n=127	Other n=76
Acres per Applicant		166.3	135.6	138.1	186.2	156.7
B-Proximity Easement	7.5	1.44	1.34	2.11	1.39	1.2
B-Proximity Non-Easement	2.5	0.87	1.15	0.13	1.17	0.68
B-Proximity to Other Potentially (or) Farm Size	5	2.56	0.92	3.15	2.96	2.08
		0.19	0.17	0.55	0.22	0.21
C-Conservation Plan	5	4.1	4.5	4.56	4.51	3.04
D-Sewer	5	3.24	3.63	3.24	2.98	3.54
D-Water	3	1.95	1.42	2.29	1.88	2.04
D-Roadway intersection	3	2.17	2.38	2.04	2.2	2.14
D-Road Frontage	5	2.85	2.38	3.32	3	2.49
D-Number homes	4	2.11	0.38	2.2	2.44	2.05
E-Local Comprehensive	6	5.95	6	6	5.94	5.92
E-Inconsistencies	5	4.45	4.17	5.02	4.85	3.55
E-No planned changes	3	2.83	2.38	3.05	3	2.57
E-Zoning	6	1.86	1.5	0.07	3.61	0
F-MSA	1	0.74	0.9	0.8	0.73	0.66
F-Ag District	2	1.88	2	1.93	1.98	1.63
F-Historic	4	0.69	0.17	0.24	1.21	0.21
F-Local Match	10	7.85	8	8.1	9.67	4.63
Bonus: No previous easement	<3>	0.85	1.38	0.59	1.04	0.51
Soils	20	14.67	13.88	16.3	15.01	13.48
Total Tier I	100	63.21	58.75	64.99	69.8	52.64